***Fighting for your bullied child***

*Programming note: Learn more about Alex’s story and see how he has transformed from bullying victim to advocate in the AC360° documentary “The Bully Effect” on Thursday, February 28 at 10 p.m. ET and March 3 and 9 at 8 p.m. ET.*

The bullying Jackie Libby’s son, Alex, faced every day was so severe that she worried the emotional toll would drive him to suicide.

“I would lay up with my husband at night and … just cry and say … what if he decides he doesn’t want to be here anymore? I mean, at that point, there was really only one more way to disengage. He was failing out of school. He wasn’t involved with his family at all. He didn’t want to have anything to do with his siblings. He didn’t have any friends,” Libby said. “There was only one more way for him to get out.”

Alex first spoke about his tormentors not to his mother but on camera to documentary filmmaker Lee Hirsch in what would become the award-winning film “Bully.”

“They punch me in the jaw, strangle me. They knock things out of my hand, take things from me, sit on me,” Alex said in the movie. “They push me so far that I want to become the bully.”

The footage Hirsch captured of Alex being beaten on the school bus was so shocking that the filmmaker felt a moral imperative to show it to Alex’s mother and officials at his school in Sioux City, Iowa. For Libby, it was the beginning of a battle for justice for her son. “My reaction was, I just started bawling, and then I got angry,” she said.

She immediately met with an assistant principal at her son’s school but did not get the results she hoped for. “I did go in there originally, when Lee told us what was going on with Alex, with the idea that all I had to do was go in and say ‘this is what’s happening.’ We’d show them the footage like Lee showed us, and they would fix it,” Libby said. “That didn’t happen.”

The response from the school was to offer to move Alex to another bus route, but the assistant principal admitted that he could become a victim of bullying no matter which bus he rode to school. The school also questioned all of Alex’s tormentors and gave them warnings, but unfortunately the abuse didn’t stop.

“Everything that happened to me on that bus happened to me every day, if not worse,” Alex said. “Some of them I grew up with, but they turned on me because they didn’t want to get bullied.”

Libby continued the fight and, after multiple meetings with the school, moved up the ladder to the superintendent. “If they don’t listen, find out who’s above them. If they don’t listen, find out who’s above them. Just keep going up, because at some point, somebody’s going to listen,” she said.

For the Libbys, while they had met with the highest official they could, the bullying continued and then spread to Alex’s younger sister.

“I got a call … saying there was an altercation with my daughter at the same school,” Libby said. “I walked in, and Maya was bawling, and the side of her face was black and blue and swollen … and she got punched in the face on the playground. Ultimately, we just decided it wasn’t a battle we were going to win on our own. So, we left.”

They first transferred their children to a school across town and eventually moved to a suburb of Oklahoma City. The family spent weeks researching school systems before deciding where to live, and Libby even walked the halls of potential new schools to soak up the school climate.

While she admits that’s not an option for a lot of families, for hers, it was the right one.

“With a child … it’s your job to protect them. I mean, from the day they are born, it is inset into you that they become more of your responsibility than even yourself. So when you’re losing them or they’re fading or you can’t save them, ultimately, you feel like a failure,” she said. “No parent ever stops trying.”

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